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ABSTRACT

A study compared people's reactions to different types of assertions concerning social issues. For purposes of the study, assertion was defined as having three components: a reference to the issue itself, an attribute having evaluative implications and a verb phrase linking the issue with the attribute. Eight types of messages were composed concerning four social issues in order to assess the generalizability of any effects. The four issues were capital punishment, handgun control, nuclear weapons freeze, and establishing a universal national service program. To elicit salient attributes of the issues, 22 college students were asked to list both the positive and negative consequences of both having and not having each policy. The five most frequently mentioned positive and negative attributes were arranged into 32 different message combinations. Next, 174 college students received the information in booklets that were presented as edited essays by other students. The subjects were guided through the four sections of the booklet, each containing a page-long summary of the topic and followed by one of the eight essays. Participants were asked to respond to two questions on their attitudes towards the issue, and the seven category scale ratings were combined into a single index. Results indicated that although essay ratings tended to vary as a function of message type, the pattern of effects was not consistent across issues. Furthermore, the relative "goodness" of messages did not correspond with relative effectiveness. (CRH)

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Type of Message and Attitude Change

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THE GENERAL GOAL OF THIS EXPLORATORY STUDY WAS TO COMPARE PEOPLE'S REACTIONS TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF MESSAGES ABOUT SEVERAL SOCIAL ISSUES. A VERBAL MESSAGE THAT IS DESIGNED TO BE PERSUASIVE CAN BE REGARDED AS A COLLECTION OF ASSERTIONS GIVING INFORMATION AND ARGUMENTS FAVORING ONE OR THE OTHER SIDE OF AN ISSUE. BASED ON EXPECTANCY-VALUE THEORY (E.G., FISHBEIN & AJZEN, 1975), ROSENBERG'S EXTENSIONS OF HEIDER'S BALANCE THEORY (1968), OTHER TYPOLOGIES OF ASSERTIONS (I.E., GOLLOB, 1974) AND OUR OWN PRIOR RESEARCH EMPLOYING BALANCE THEORY IN CONSTRUCTING LIKERT ATTITUDE INDICES (EDWARDS & McCOMBIE, 1981), WE BELIEVE THERE ARE EIGHT BASICALLY DIFFERENT TYPES OF ASSERTIONS THAT CAN BE MADE ABOUT ANY ATTITUDE OBJECT OR ISSUE.

ACCORDING TO THE AFOREMENTIONED CONCEPTUALIZATIONS, AN ASSERTION CONSISTS OF THREE COMPONENTS: A REFERENCE TO THE ISSUE ITSELF, AN ATTRIBUTE HAVING EVALUATIVE IMPLICATIONS, AND A VERB PHRASE LINKING THE ISSUE WITH THE ATTRIBUTE. IN THE SIMPLEST CASE, EACH COMPONENT CAN TAKE ONE OF TWO FORMS: THE ASSERTION CAN REFER TO EITHER ONE SIDE OF THE ISSUE OR ITS OPPOSITE, THE ATTRIBUTE CAN BE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE, AND THE LINKAGE CAN BE EITHER A POSITIVE (E.G., "LEADS TO") OR NEGATIVE (E.G., "PREVENTS") VERB PHRASE. THESE COMPONENTS, THEN, YIELD 2^3 OR EIGHT COMBINATIONS OF TYPES OF ASSERTIONS.

ONE VIRTUE OF THIS THEORETICALLY BASED SYSTEM FOR CONSTRUCTING DECLARATIVE STATEMENTS IS THAT THE SAME COMPONENTS CAN BE ARRANGED IN DIFFERENT COMBINATIONS PRODUCING FOUR STATEMENTS ON BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE. CONSIDER THE EXAMPLES SHOWN IN TABLE 1 REGARDING THE ISSUE OF REDUCING VERSUS INCREASING NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THESE SHOW THAT ADVOCATES OF BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE CAN ARGUE THAT THEIR SIDE LEADS TO GOOD OR PREVENTS BAD OUTCOMES, OR THAT THE OPPOSING POLICY LEADS TO BAD OR PREVENTS GOOD OUTCOMES.

IN THIS STUDY, EIGHT TYPES OF MESSAGES WERE COMPOSED, EACH CONSISTING OF SEVEN ASSERTIONS THAT WERE ALL THE SAME TYPE. OF COURSE, DIFFERENT VERB PHRASES AND ATTRIBUTES WERE USED FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL ASSERTION IN A GIVEN MESSAGE. MESSAGES WERE PREPARED ON FOUR SEPARATE SOCIAL ISSUES IN ORDER TO ASSESS GENERALIZABILITY OF ANY EFFECTS.

OWING TO ITS EXPLORATORY NATURE, NO SPECIFIC HYPOTHESES WERE TESTED IN THIS STUDY. HOWEVER, IN VIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH ON JUDGMENTS OF STATEMENTS (E.G., THOMPSON, GARD & PHILLIPS, 1980) AND ON THE FRAMING OF DECISION PROBLEMS (KAHNEMAN & TVERSKY, 1984), IT WAS EXPECTED THAT THE VARIATIONS ILLUSTRATED IN TABLE 1 WOULD BE JUDGED DIFFERENTLY, AND MIGHT RESULT IN DIFFERENT POST-MESSAGES ATTITUDES ON THE MESSAGE TOPICS.

TABLE 1

EXAMPLES OF EIGHT TYPES OF STATEMENTS ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

	SIDE	LINK	ATTRIB.	
				PRO-REDUCTION OR ANTI-BUILDUP OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS
1.	A	+	+	REDUCING OUR STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD INCREASE THE CHANCES OF WORLD PEACE.
2.	B	+	-	BUILDING UP OUR STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD INCREASE THE CHANCES OF A WORLD WAR.
3.	B	-	+	BUILDING UP OUR STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD REDUCE THE CHANCES OF WORLD PEACE.
4.	A	-	-	REDUCING OUR STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD REDUCE THE CHANCES OF A WORLD WAR.
				PRO-BUILDUP OR ANTI-REDUCTION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS
5.	B	+	+	BUILDING UP OUR STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD INCREASE THE CHANCES OF WORLD PEACE.
6.	A	+	-	REDUCING OUR STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD INCREASE THE CHANCES OF A WORLD WAR.
7.	A	-	+	REDUCING OUR STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD REDUCE THE CHANCES OF WORLD PEACE.
8.	B	-	-	BUILDING UP OUR STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD REDUCE THE CHANCES OF A WORLD WAR.

METHOD

THE FOUR ISSUES USED IN THIS EXPERIMENT WERE: CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, HANDGUN CONTROL, NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREEZE, AND ESTABLISHING A UNIVERSAL NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM. IN ORDER TO ELICIT SALIENT ATTRIBUTES OF THE ISSUES, 22 STUDENTS WERE ASKED TO LIST BOTH THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF BOTH HAVING AND NOT HAVING EACH OF THESE FOUR POLICIES. AFTER CODING THE OPEN-ENDED REPLIES, THE FIVE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES WERE SELECTED FOR EACH ISSUE. THESE WERE USED IN THE VARIOUS POSSIBLE COMBINATIONS TO CREATE 32 (8 MESSAGE TYPES X 4 ISSUES) DIFFERENT MESSAGES.

EACH MESSAGE CONTAINED SEVEN SENTENCES THAT WERE ALL OF ONE OF THE EIGHT TYPES. THE FIRST AND LAST ASSERTIONS REFERRED TO GENERIC PROS AND CONS OF THE POLICY, WHILE THE INTERVENING FIVE REFERRED TO THE SALIENT ATTRIBUTES DISCUSSED ABOVE. USING THE COUNTERBALANCING PROCEDURE ILLUSTRATED IN TABLE 1, EACH UNIQUE ATTRIBUTE APPEARED IN FOUR OF THE EIGHT MESSAGES ABOUT AN ISSUE.

THE BASIC DESIGN FOR THE EXPERIMENT WAS A 4(SOCIAL ISSUE) X 2(SIDE MENTIONED IN MESSAGE) X 2(SIGN OF VERB LINKAGE) X 2(SIGN OF ATTRIBUTE) FACTORIAL. ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FOUR MALE AND FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS SERVED AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF A COURSE REQUIREMENT IN THEIR INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY CLASS.

ALL OF THE RESEARCH MATERIALS WERE PRESENTED TO STUDENTS IN A BOOKLET. IN ORDER TO TEMPORARILY DISGUISE OUR ACTUAL PURPOSES, THE TWO PAGE INTRODUCTION STATED THAT THE STUDY'S AIM WAS TO OBTAIN RATINGS FROM STUDENTS OF OTHER STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITIES. IT WAS SUGGESTED THAT GATHERING RATINGS OF SHORT ESSAYS MIGHT BE HELPFUL IN DEVELOPING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ABOUT THE LEVEL OF WRITING SKILL REQUIRED IN COLLEGE. PARTICIPANTS WERE LEAD TO BELIEVE THE ESSAY AUTHORS HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO ARGUE FOR SOME VIEWPOINT ON A CURRENT SOCIAL ISSUE, AND THAT THE ESSAYS HAD BEED EDITED TO INSURE COMPARABLE LENGTH.

FOLLOWING THIS INTRODUCTION, STUDENTS WORKED THROUGH FOUR SECTIONS OF THE BOOKLET. EACH SECTION DEALT WITH A DIFFERENT SOCIAL ISSUE AND BEGAN WITH A PAGE LONG "TOPIC DESCRIPTION" INTRODUCING BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY A PAGE CONTAINING ONE OF THE EIGHT ESSAYS ON THAT TOPIC.

AFTER READING AN ESSAY, PARTICIPANTS WERE ASKED TO RESPOND TO TWO QUESTIONS ON THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ISSUE "AS AN AID IN INTERPRETING THE ESSAY RATINGS." BOTH QUESTIONS USED SEVEN CATEGORY SCALES. ONE ASKED IF THE POLICY ESPOUSED WAS A GOOD (OR BAD) IDEA: AND THE OTHER ASKED HOW MUCH THEY FAVORED (OR OPPOSED) THAT POLICY. PRIOR TO ANALYSIS, THESE TWO ATTITUDE RATINGS WERE COMBINED INTO A SINGLE INDEX.

THE ATTITUDE RATINGS WERE FOLLOWED BY A PAGE CONTAINING 10 SCALES IN SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL FORMAT ASKING FOR RATINGS OF THE ESSAY ON THE DIMENSIONS OF: ORGANIZATION, CONVINCINGNESS, CLARITY, ORIGINALITY, PERSUASIVENESS, LOGIC, CORRECTNESS, INTERESTINGNESS, EASE OF UNDERSTANDABILITY AND THOROUGHNESS. FOR THE ANALYSIS, THESE 10 ESSAY RATINGS WERE COMBINED INTO A SINGLE SCORE SUCH THAT HIGHER RATINGS INDICATED MORE FAVORABLE JUDGMENTS. FINALLY, STUDENTS WERE ASKED TO WRITE DOWN THEIR REACTIONS TO THE ESSAY.

THESE STEPS OF TOPIC INTRODUCTION, ESSAY READING, ATTITUDE MEASUREMENT AND ESSAY RATINGS WERE REPEATED FOR ALL FOUR ISSUES. THE FINAL PAGE OF THE BOOKLET CONTAINED SEVERAL OPEN-ENDED ITEMS DESIGNED TO ELICIT OTHER REACTIONS TO THE MESSAGES AND TO THE EXPERIMENT ITSELF--INCLUDING POSSIBLE SUSPICIONS.

BOOKLETS WERE PREPARED SO THAT THEY CONTAINED ONLY ONE OF THE EIGHT MESSAGES ON EACH TOPIC. AS A RESULT OF THIS CONTROL AND THE FACT THAT EACH STUDENT READ ONLY FOUR ESSAYS, EACH OF THE 32 MESSAGES WAS EVALUATED BY BETWEEN [illegible] TO 25 STUDENTS. TOPIC ORDER WAS COUNTER-BALANCED ACROSS BOOKLETS SO THAT EACH TOPIC WAS PRESENTED FIRST, SECOND, ETC. ABOUT EQUALLY OFTEN.

DATA WERE COLLECTED IN SMALL GROUP SESSIONS CONTAINING FIVE TO 15 PEOPLE TO WHOM BOOKLETS WERE RANDOMLY ASSIGNED. STUDENTS WERE CAREFULLY MONITORED TO INSURE THEY WENT THROUGH THE PAGES IN PROPER ORDER. AFTER COMPLETING THEIR BOOKLETS, STUDENTS WERE GIVEN AN EXPLANATION OF OUR ACTUAL PURPOSES, REASONS FOR THE DISGUISE, AND HOW THE STUDY RELATED TO THEIR PSYCHOLOGY COURSE.

AS SUGGESTED BY TABLE 1, THE FOUR TYPES OF MESSAGES ON BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE CAN BE COMPARED IN TERMS OF THE "SIGNS" OF THEIR VERB LINKAGE AND ATTRIBUTE COMPONENTS (I.E., + +, + -, - +, AND + +). WHETHER AN ASSERTION CONSISTING OF ONE OF THESE FOUR COMBINATIONS IS PRO OR ANTI SOME ISSUE DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON WHICH SIDE IS REFERRED TO IN THE FIRST COMPONENT (E.G., COMPARE TYPES 1 AND 5 IN TABLE 1). THIS FEATURE WAS THE BASIS OF THE DATA ANALYSIS DESIGN.

SEPARATE 2 (PRO OR ANTI A POLICY) X 4 (LINK/ATTRIBUTE COMBINATION) BETWEEN-SUBJECTS ANALYSES OF VARIANCE WERE COMPUTED FOR EACH ISSUE FOR BOTH THE ATTITUDE AND ESSAY EVALUATION INDICES. A MAIN EFFECT OF THE FIRST FACTOR WOULD SIMPLY SHOW WHETHER MESSAGES ON ONE SIDE PRODUCED DIFFERENT REACTIONS THAN THOSE ON THE OTHER, A MAIN EFFECT OF THE SECOND FACTOR WOULD INDICATE DIFFERENCES DUE TO MESSAGE TYPE, WHILE AN INTERACTION EFFECT WOULD REVEAL WHETHER THE IMPACT OF MESSAGE TYPE VARIED WITH SIDE OF ISSUE.

TABLE 2 PRESENTS THE MEAN COMBINED ATTITUDE SCORES FOR THE FOUR ISSUES AS A FUNCTION OF SIDE TAKEN BY A MESSAGE (PRO OR ANTI) AND MESSAGE TYPE. THE DATA ARE ARRANGED IN THIS TABLE SO THAT HIGHER SCORES INDICATE MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE SIDE OF THE ISSUE SHOWN IN THE TABLE HEADINGS. THUS, HIGHER SCORES MEAN MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD ABOLISHING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, CONTROLLING HANDGUN OWNERSHIP, FREEZING PRODUCTION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND ESTABLISHING A UNIVERSAL NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM. CONSEQUENTLY, THE "PRO" MEANS SHOULD BE HIGHER THAN THE "ANTI" MEANS FOR ALL ISSUES.

FOR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, THE ANALYSIS SHOWED THAT THE PRO-ABOLISHMENT MESSAGES PRODUCED SIGNIFICANTLY MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDES

THAN THE ANTI-ABOLISHMENT ONES, $F(1,167) = 6.00$, $p < .015$), BUT THE EFFECT OF MESSAGE TYPE AND THE INTERACTION EFFECT WERE NOT SIGNIFICANT. FOR THE HANDGUN ISSUE, THE ANALYSIS YIELDED NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS ALTHOUGH MESSAGE TYPES TENDED TO VARY IN EFFECTIVENESS, $F(1, 166) = 2.13$, $p = .10$. NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS OR MARGINAL TRENDS EMERGED FROM THE ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDE RATINGS ON THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS ISSUE. FOR UNIVERSAL NATIONAL SERVICE, THE ANALYSIS PRODUCED ONLY A MAIN EFFECT OF PRO/ANTI, $F(1, 166) = 6.83$, $p < .01$, IN THE EXPECTED DIRECTION.

TO SUMMARIZE, THESE MESSAGES PRODUCED FEW SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS, AND MESSAGE TYPE IN PARTICULAR FAILED TO PRODUCE VARIATIONS IN ATTITUDES. HOWEVER, SEVERAL INTERESTING TENDENCIES APPEARED THAT ARE DISCUSSED IN LATER SECTIONS.

TABLE 2

MEAN ATTITUDE SCORES AS A FUNCTION OF MESSAGE TYPE

		ABOLISH CAPITAL PUNISHMENT		HANDGUN CONTROL		NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREEZE		UNIVERSAL NATIONAL SERVICE	
LINK	ATTRIB.	ANTI	PRO	ANTI	PRO	ANTI	PRO	ANTI	PRO
+	+	5.91	7.05	7.13	7.78	8.35	7.48	6.09	7.68
+	-	6.48	6.95	8.64	8.73	8.32	9.81	7.36	7.27
-	+	6.64	7.27	8.57	8.58	8.45	8.27	6.42	8.43
-	-	6.48	8.20	7.00	7.80	7.80	8.48	6.68	7.96

TABLE 3 PRESENTS THE MEAN COMBINED ESSAY RATINGS ON THE FOUR ISSUES AS A FUNCTION OF SIDE TAKEN BY A MESSAGE (PRO OR ANTI) AND MESSAGE TYPE. IN ALL CASES, HIGHER SCORES INDICATE MORE POSITIVE RATINGS OF THE MESSAGES.

TABLE 3

MEAN MESSAGE QUALITY RATINGS AS A FUNCTION OF MESSAGE TYPE

		ABOLISH CAPITAL PUNISHMENT		HANDGUN CONTROL		NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREEZE		UNIVERSAL NATIONAL SERVICE	
LINK	ATTRIB.	ANTI	PRO	ANTI	PRO	ANTI	PRO	ANTI	PRO
+	+	43.2	32.7	41.6	39.4	47.0	44.6	41.5	46.3
+	-	45.0	27.9	44.6	47.0	40.0	45.4	47.8	37.4
-	+	39.6	36.5	38.7	41.2	44.6	41.6	34.4	40.5
-	-	46.1	29.6	40.8	40.5	45.1	42.0	46.0	41.1

FOR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, THE ANALYSIS REVEALED NO EFFECT OF MESSAGE TYPE; MESSAGES ARGUING FOR THE ABOLISHMENT OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT WERE RATED MUCH LESS FAVORABLY THAN WERE THOSE ARGUING TO RETAIN CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, $F(1, 163 = 39.95$, $p < .0001$; BUT THE SIZE OF THIS EFFECT VARIED ACROSS MESSAGE TYPES--INTERACTION $F(3, 163) = 3.20$, $p < .025$. FOR THE HANDGUN ISSUE, THERE WAS NO EFFECT OF WHETHER THE MESSAGES WERE PRO OR ANTI, NOR WAS THE INTERACTION SIGNIFICANT. HOWEVER, SOME MESSAGE TYPES (I.E., + -) TENDED TO YIELD HIGHER RATINGS THAN OTHERS, $F(3, 163) = 2.65$, $p < .05$). ON THE NUCLEAR FREEZE ISSUE, THERE WERE NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES AMONG THE RATINGS

OF THE EIGHT MESSAGES. FINALLY, ESSAY RATINGS ON THE UNIVERSAL NATIONAL SERVICE ISSUE VARIED WITH MESSAGE TYPE, $F(1, 165) = 2.95$, $p < .03$, BUT THESE DIFFERENCES VARIED ACCORDING TO WHETHER THE MESSAGE WAS PRO OR ANTI--INTERACTION $F(3, 165) = 5.84$, $p < .001$.

TO SUMMARIZE, ALTHOUGH ESSAY RATINGS TENDED TO VARY AS A FUNCTION OF MESSAGE TYPE, THE PATTERN OF EFFECTS WAS NOT CONSISTENT ACROSS ISSUES. FURTHERMORE, THE RELATIVE "GOODNESS" OF MESSAGES DID NOT CORRESPOND WITH RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS. COMPARING THE MEANS IN TABLES 2 AND 3 SHOWS THAT THE APPARENTLY MORE EFFECTIVE MESSAGES WERE OFTEN RATED RELATIVELY LOW IN QUALITY.

ALTHOUGH THIS EXPLORATORY EXPERIMENT FAILED TO SHOW SIGNIFICANT OR CONSISTENT EFFECTS OF MESSAGE TYPES ON ATTITUDES, SEVERAL TRENDS IN THE RESULTS MIGHT JUSTIFY FURTHER RESEARCH ON THE TYPOLOGY PRESENTED HERE. FOR EXAMPLE, A CAREFUL INSPECTION OF THE MEANS IN TABLE 2 SHOWS THAT, COMBINED OVER ISSUES, THE MESSAGE ARGUING THAT A POLICY WOULD "PREVENT BAD OUTCOMES" WAS GENERALLY THE MOST EFFECTIVE, WHILE THE MESSAGE ARGUING THAT A POLICY WOULD "LEAD TO BAD OUTCOMES" WAS GENERALLY LEAST EFFECTIVE. HOWEVER, EVEN THIS TREND DID NOT HOLD FOR ALL ISSUES. SIMILARLY, CONSIDERING THE RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FOUR MESSAGES ON EITHER SIDE OF ALL ISSUES ALSO SUGGESTS THE GREATER OVERALL IMPACT AND LESS VARIABLE IMPACT OF THE "PREVENTS BAD OUTCOMES" TYPE OF STATEMENT.

THE PATTERNS OBSERVED IN THE RATINGS OF ESSAY QUALITY WERE EVEN LESS CLEAR. COMBINING OVER ISSUES, MESSAGES ASSERTING THAT A POLICY OR ATTITUDE OBJECT WOULD "PREVENT GOOD OUTCOMES" WERE GENERALLY RATED LOWEST AND THOSE ASSERTING A POLICY WOULD "LEAD TO BAD OUTCOMES" WERE MORE OFTEN RATED HIGHEST. BUT, AGAIN, THESE VERY SLIGHT TENDENCIES WERE NOT CONSISTENT ACROSS ISSUES.

A GENEROUS INTERPRETATION OF THESE RESULTS WOULD BE THAT VARIATIONS IN TYPES OF MESSAGES, I.E., WHICH SIDE OF AN ISSUE THEY REFER TO AND HOW THAT SIDE IS LINKED WITH ATTRIBUTES, MIGHT PRODUCE DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES AND OTHER EVALUATIVE REACTIONS. A LESS GENEROUS INTERPRETATION IS THAT VARIATIONS IN COMPONENTS OF THE ASSERTIONS IN A MESSAGE HAVE NO EFFECT--IN AND OF THEMSELVES--ON ATTITUDES TOWARD ISSUES OR MESSAGES. AT THIS POINT, NEITHER INTERPRETATION IS FULLY JUSTIFIED.

DESPITE THE WEAK AND INCONSISTENT EFFECTS OF MESSAGE TYPES, THE PRESENT FINDINGS PROVIDE SOME INTERESTING INSIGHTS. FOR EXAMPLE, ONE PERSPECTIVE ON THE DATA IN TABLE 2 IS THAT THE MOST EFFECTIVE TYPE OF MESSAGE FOR ONE SIDE OF AN ISSUE IS NOT THE SAME AS FOR THE OTHER SIDE. ON THE CAPITAL PUNISHMENT TOPIC, FOR INSTANCE, THE MOST EFFECTIVE ANTI MESSAGE ASSERTED THAT "BAD OUTCOMES WOULD BE PREVENTED" IF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT WERE ABOLISHED: BUT THE MOST EFFECTIVE PRO MESSAGE ARGUED THAT "GOOD OUTCOMES WOULD OCCUR " IF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT WERE RETAINED. HOWEVER, DIFFERENT SETS OF "MOST EFFECTIVE" MESSAGES WERE OBSERVED FOR THE OPPOSING SIDES OF THE OTHER ISSUES. THEREFORE, AT BEST IT CAN BE CONCLUDED THAT MESSAGE IMPACT (SUCH AS IT WAS) IN THIS STUDY DEPENDED ON: WHICH SIDE OF THE ISSUE IT FAVORED, TYPE OF ASSERTIONS IT CONTAINED AND THE PARTICULAR ISSUE WITH WHICH IT WAS CONCERNED.

THIS RATHER UNTIDY CONCLUSION MUST BE VIEWED IN LIGHT OF SEVERAL METHODOLOGICAL FEATURES OF THIS EXPERIMENT THAT COULD BE ALTERED IN SUBSEQUENT RESEARCH. FIRST, EXCEPT POSSIBLY FOR UNIVERSAL SERVICE, THE ISSUES USED WERE HIGHLY FAMILIAR, AND PERHAPS PRE-EXPERIMENTAL ATTITUDES ON THEM WERE STRONGLY HELD. EFFECTS OF MESSAGE TYPE VARIATIONS MIGHT BE GREATER FOR UNFAMILIAR, LESS INVOLVING ISSUES. SECOND, THE NUMBER OF RATERS FOR EACH OF THE 32 MESSAGES WAS FAIRLY SMALL. RELATEDLY, SINCE WE TOOK NO PRE-MESSAGE ATTITUDE MEASURES, WE DO NOT

KNOW FOR HOW MANY OF OUR EVALUATORS A GIVEN MESSAGE WAS CONSISTENT AS OPPOSED TO CONTRARY TO THEIR PRIOR ATTITUDES. GIVEN THE VERY REAL POSSIBILITY THAT MESSAGE EFFECTIVENESS MIGHT DEPEND ON WHETHER ITS RECIPIENT INITIALLY AGREES OR DISAGREES WITH IT, A STUDY EXPOSING LARGER NUMBERS OF RECIPIENTS WHO ARE KNOWN TO BE ON ONE SIDE OF AN ISSUE OR THE OTHER WOULD ENHANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WIDELY RANGING REACTIONS TO EACH MESSAGE TYPE THAT HAVE BEEN DEMONSTRATED IN THE PRESENT EXPERIMENT.

THIRD, AND PROBABLY THE MOST SERIOUS SOURCE OF RESPONSE VARIATIONS IN THIS STUDY, AROSE FROM OUR ATTEMPT TO CONTROL SOME ASPECTS OF MESSAGE CONTENT BY USING THE SAME ATTRIBUTES IN ALL KINDS OF ASSERTIONS. TABLE 1 IS INTENDED TO ILLUSTRATE THAT SUCH A PRACTICE CAN SOMETIMES WORK. YET, IN OTHER CASES THIS PROCEDURE WILL RESULT IN ASSERTIONS THAT MOST READERS WOULD PROBABLY FIND IMPLAUSIBLE OR AT LEAST CONFUSING, E.G., "ALLOWING PRIVATE CITIZENS TO OWN HANDGUNS HELPS PREVENT ACCIDENTAL INJURIES AND DEATHS AROUND THE HOME." THE IMPORTANT LESSON HERE IS THAT THE PARTICULAR ATTRIBUTES OR OUTCOMES EMPHASIZED BY ADVOCATES OF ONE SIDE OF AN ISSUE MAY NOT ALWAYS BE COMPATABLE WITH, OR EVEN THE MIRROR IMAGE OF, ATTRIBUTES EMPHASIZED BY ADVOCATES OF THE OPPOSING SIDE. THE "PRO-LIFE" VERSUS "PRO-CHOICE" LANGUAGE OF THE OPPONENTS ON THE ABORTION ISSUE IS ONE CURRENT EXAMPLE OF THIS POINT. EXPERIMENTS CAN BE DONE IN WHICH ATTRIBUTES, AS THEY ARE NATURALLY USED BY ADVOCATES OF OPPOSING SIDES, ARE PLACED WITHIN OUR EIGHT-FOLD TYPOLOGY, BUT THEY WOULD IMPOSE INTERPRETIVE PROBLEMS.

FROM FURTHER RESEARCH ON MESSAGE TYPES, GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ATTITUDE CHANGE INVOLVING PROMISED GAINS VERSUS THREATENED LOSSES MAY EMERGE THAT PARALLEL THOSE FOUND IN OTHER DOMAINS OF SOCIAL COGNITION, AND THAT ENLIGHTEN THE BASES OF SOCIAL CONTROVERSY.

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